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Batchelder land toured

Hampton residents see parcel up for conservation

Photo 1 of 4 | Zoom Photo +



Residents get a first-hand look Sunday at what their money will buy if they approve a request to direct \$250,000 to its effort to protect historic Batchelder Farm on Exeter Road in Hampton from future development.

Cheryl Senter photo

By Karen Dandurant
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February 28, 2011 2:00 AM

HAMPTON — Members of the Conservation Commission led a snowshoe tour Sunday of the Batchelder Farm property, land they hope voters will support protecting next week.

A warrant article, to be voted on Tuesday, March 8, asks voter support to raise and appropriate \$250,000 that will be put toward purchasing the easement rights to the 120-acre parcel along Exeter Road, preventing development of the land and preserving it for passive recreation uses by residents.

"It has long been a priority for the conservation commission to protect this land," said David Viale of the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire. "If successful, we will hold and manage the easement of the land. This is a historic piece for Hampton. It has always been in the Batchelder family and they are descendents of one of the original founding families of the town."

Viale said the land is also a priority for preservation through the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan and the Land Conservation Plan for New Hampshire's Coastal Watersheds.

"It has some of the most productive farm soils in the state and there are significant wildlife habitats and water resources," he said. "We have an agreement with the landowners, but the option to purchase the rights expires in July. Someone could easily put 10 or more houses here and we do not want to see that happen."

Tom Batchelder, one of four brothers who own the property, said he hopes to see it remain untouched.

"We all grew up here," he said. "This has always been here for us and it's easy to take it for granted. But I have seen so much change in Hampton since I have been here, so I know it could happen."

Viale said the total price of the easement rights is about \$840,000. They already have \$130,000 in committed funds, and if voters approve in March, the conservationists can apply for up to \$400,000 in federal funds. Any remaining costs can likely be made up through donations of private funds.

"We are asking voters to support about 30 percent of the cost," Viale said. "In terms of tax money, that's 8 cents per thousand dollars of valuation. For the average homeowner, at an assessed value of \$366,000, that's a one-time cost of \$30."

Conservation Commission Chairman Jay Diener said that while he hasn't talked to everyone in town, those he has spoken with are in favor of the plan.

"No one spoke against it at the deliberative session," Diener said. "In fact, people spoke in favor of it. The warrant article does have the endorsement of both the selectmen and the budget committee."

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